

February 9, 2021

House Committee on Water

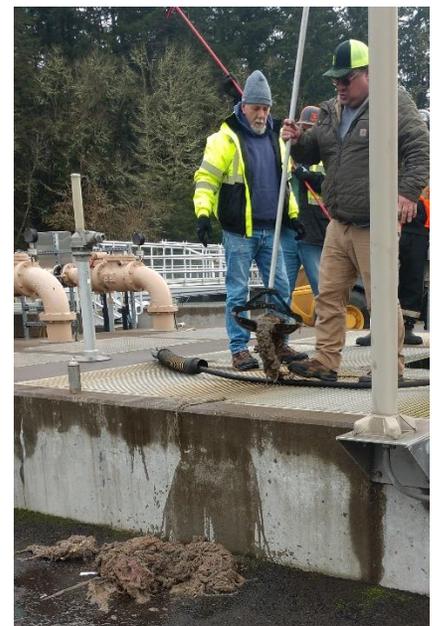
Dear Chair Ken Helm, Members of the Committee

The City of Cottage Grove offers testimony supporting House Bill 2344. We have had a recent experience that we would like to share regarding the impact of disposable wipes.

On January 4<sup>th</sup> we were struggling at our wastewater plant. The plant is designed to handle flows up to 13 million gallons a day (MGD) but we were having a terrible time trying to get the plant to process only 7 MGD. Higher flows were expected as a major storm system was moving into the area. Our plant operators were very concerned that we would have overflows of raw sewage unless we could find what was restricting the flow.

The crew went to work checking every junction, access point and screen location in the plant during a break between storms. At the headworks to the treatment plant we have a bar screen which is designed to remove all debris (sticks, hygiene products, dentures, plastics, rags etc.) from the waste before it enters any of the treatment systems. From the bar screen the wastewater flows into our oxidation ditch that begins the treatment process. After feeding oxygen to the bacteria the waste begins to settle out and go through one part of the plant and the now clearer water goes to the clarifiers for the final settling and waste removal before disinfection.

At the entrance into the final clarifier crews discovered a screen about 5 feet wide by 10 feet long that was covered by a blanket of material that was over 1 foot thick. The attached photos do not do justice to the efforts it took to remove this interwoven mass of wipes and other materials. It took the entire crew several hours to remove the material. At times the material had to be cut apart by hand with a knife to try to get it into "globs" that could be removed from the screen.



The material removed had made it past the bar screen and through most of the treatment process to tangle and collect on the screen entering the final clarifier. We believe that the increased use of disposable disinfectant wipes over the last few months during the pandemic contributed to this massive accumulation.

The wipes create huge issue for the wastewater plant. They settle in the oxidation ditch that reduces the capacity of the plant; they collect and entangle other material or fats and greases; they cause extra wear and tear on pumps and machinery; they create false readings on flow meters; they tangle in float systems that cause the pumps to turn on or off improperly and in this case they plug screens and reduce flows that could lead to environmentally damaging overflows of raw sewage.

Disposable wipes don't just create issues at the wastewater treatment plant but throughout the entire collection system including our citizen's private waste lines where the wipes have been responsible for clogs or costly repairs.

We continually try to educate citizens about the proper items to flush. Our message to flush only #1, #2 and TP has been helpful and increased the awareness about the challenges created by flushing disposable wipes. But that same message to not flush disposable wipes down the toilet should be included on the packaging for the wipes themselves to help further clarify the message – “wipes should be disposed of properly in the trash – not in the toilet”.

Thank you for considering this serious issue and helping to reduce costly repairs or damage to public and private wastewater infrastructure.

If you have any questions or need any further information please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Richard Meyers  
City Manager



Figure 1- Starting the removal of the material



Figure 2- After the removal of the material

## Wipes clog pipes

**Avoid sewer backups and protect your pipes!**  
**Dispose of these items in the trash, NOT the toilet.**

- Disinfecting wipes
- Baby wipes
- Towelettes
- Paper towels
- Facial tissues



 City of  
COTTAGE GROVE